



EUTHANASIA – SAYING GOODBYE

The decision to undertake euthanasia is never an easy one. However, when there is no reasonable alternative, to enable your beloved cat to die in peace and dignity, can be a tremendous relief. Euthanasia is often considered the “last kindness” that a caring owner may give to a suffering cat, and both vets and owners together hold a responsibility to prevent unnecessary suffering to the animals in our care.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CAT IS “PUT TO SLEEP”?

The actual procedure of euthanasia is usually very simple and painless for a cat, involving an injection of a large overdose of an anaesthetic agent, that will simply cause your cat to lose consciousness (fall asleep), and then the heart will stop rapidly and they will die peacefully. This injection is normally given into a vein in a front leg, and loss of consciousness usually occurs in a matter of seconds.

Sometimes, following loss of consciousness, your cat may take a deep breath or gasp, and there may be some involuntary twitching or muscle spasms for a short while following death. Passing urine or faeces often also occurs shortly after your cat has passed away. These signs are all quite normal and should not be mistaken as signs of life.

Euthanasia performed this way is usually very quick, controlled, painless and stress-free. However, some cats can be quite nervous at the vets, or may well be quite sore to have their legs held, so your vet may advise giving a sedative injection to help them relax prior to giving the euthanasia injection, to ensure their final moments are completely free of stress or discomfort. A catheter may also be placed into the vein in the leg prior to euthanasia, to ensure the final injection is given smoothly.

Old and sick cats often have very fragile veins, so finding a suitable vein to administer the injection can sometimes take a few minutes, and the veins do occasionally collapse, meaning your vet may have to change injection sites. The important thing to remember if staying with your cat during euthanasia, is to try to stay calm and quiet in order to comfort your cat during this time. Cats are very good at picking up on panic or upset from their owners, which will likely cause them some distress.



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On rare occasions, it may not be possible for your vet to administer the injection into a vein, in which case the injection may be given into the abdomen. In this situation, the process should still be peaceful, but may take longer for loss of consciousness to occur.

PLANNING FOR EUTHANASIA

Being able to plan and prepare for euthanasia can often make the whole process that bit easier to come to terms with. Please do not feel afraid to speak to the veterinary team and ask questions about the process in order to help you with planning and coming to terms with saying goodbye to your much loved friend. We understand that this is a very important and emotional time for both you and your cat, and being able to plan for the event in advance with a clear head can make decision-making less difficult.

The choice of whether to be present whilst euthanasia is performed is entirely your choice. Many owners choose to stay with their cat, but you should not feel guilty if you find this too distressing and would prefer not to be present. One of our nurses will stay with your cat and take care of them like their own.

Some owners prefer to have their cat euthanased at home in familiar surroundings. With a little notice, this is generally possible, but also be aware that some cats can behave differently in their home territory when strangers are present. If you have other pets in the house, some owners ask for them to see their cat following euthanasia, especially if they were closely bonded, as this can sometimes help them to accept why their housemate is suddenly no longer around.

Following euthanasia, whether at the surgery or in your home, you may wish to spend a little time alone with your cat. We can also take fur clippings which can be created into a keepsake for you if you would like.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY CAT AFTER BEING “PUT TO SLEEP”?

Following euthanasia, you can choose if you would like to take your cat home to bury, or if you would prefer for them to be cremated. Cremation options include a communal cremation with other pets, or an individual cremation, where your cat is cremated on their own, giving you the option to have their ashes returned to you. This is another area where being able to plan before the event can take away some of the painful decision-making at the time of euthanasia. We can give you a brochure to help you decide about our cremation services and options.



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GRIEVING

It is completely natural to feel upset and emotional when your cat dies – please don't be afraid to show your feelings in front of the vet – we have all been there and completely understand.

Getting over your loss can take time – it is perfectly normal to feel grief for a pet as they are often considered part of the family. Many people can feel a mixture of emotions during this time, such as bewilderment, sadness, loneliness and even anger, which are all a normal part of the process of coming to terms with your loss. The decision to perform euthanasia is usually reached as an act of kindness to avoid suffering, so you should not feel guilty for making this decision.

Treasure the memories you have, remembering the good times and what you loved so much about your cat. It can help to talk about your feelings with a friend or family member, but for extra support or to speak to a professional in confidence it may be worth contacting the **Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support Service on 0800 096 6606** or by filling in a confidential form on their website.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Whilst many children are quite resilient, some may have difficulties with grieving and coming to terms with the loss of a pet. This may be the child's first experience of death, and it is important to be honest with them and encourage them to talk and share your feelings with them. Talk openly about your cat, concentrating on the good times. It can be helpful to go through the ritual of burying with the children and let them be involved in marking the grave or writing a message for your cat that could be kept in a keepsake with some pictures. A new pet can sometimes help, but avoid getting another cat too soon to allow you and your child time to get over the death of your previous cat.

The children's book "**Missing My Pet**" is available to purchase from the surgery, and can be useful for helping your child understand the process of euthanasia and the death of a pet.

